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Snyder: Make Graduation Rules Flexible to Boost Career Ed

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan's high school graduation requirements would become more flexible and include a mandatory career readiness course under a series of recommendations and moves announced Monday by Gov. Rick Snyder, who said more must be done to help students fill in-demand jobs in the trades.

Snyder called on lawmakers to change the requirements, known as the Michigan Merit Curriculum, to mandate that a career exploration/job skills class be completed in seventh or eighth grade. He said computer science should count to meet a foreign language requirement and that students should be able to fulfill health and physical education requirements by completing career health programs.

The curriculum changes were included in a broader list of "career pathway" proposals developed after top state officials gathered input from employers, educators and union leaders. Recommendations include using certain career planning programs statewide, enhancing career counseling, letting career and technical education students earn an industry-recognized credential, and increasing the number of trade instructors.

To graduate from high school in Michigan, students must earn at least 18 credits in seven subject areas and complete an online course or learning component. Those who graduate in 2021 or earlier already can fulfill up to half of the two-credit foreign language requirement by completing a career and technical education program or earning another credit in visual, performing or applied arts.

The Republican-governor's announcement came about three months after the GOP-led House voted 69-39 to replace the foreign language and art requirements with a three-credit "21st century skills" requirement. It could be met by any combination of a foreign language, art, computer science or computer coding class, or a career technical education program.

The legislation is pending in the Republican-controlled Senate, where a special subcommittee has been studying the graduation requirements. Proponents say students have had less flexibility to take career technical education courses or other classes since the more rigorous requirements were enacted in 2006. Critics say learning a foreign language exposes students to different cultures and could help them later on in business.

Snyder made the announcement with state Superintendent Brian Whiston, Talent and Economic Development Director Roger Curtis and others at auto supplier Brose North America Inc.'s headquarters in Auburn Hills. The company is starting its first high school apprenticeship program.

Curtis said the state must change the perception of working in the trades so students and their parents know of great opportunities that are available.

"Once we've shattered stereotypes, we need to have a stronger system in place for students to determine the best pathway for them, then have access to the rigorous training to get them the job they want — no matter where they live," he said in a statement.